



What works? What fails?

FINDINGS FROM THE NAVRONGO COMMUNITY HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING PROJECT



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Navrongo Health Research Centre

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Under the Community Health and Family Planning Project health volunteers and village health committees have been assigned specific responsibilities in the new strategy for making health services widely accessible and affordable. But who do health volunteers and village health committee members say they are and what do they do? Notes 11 and 12 are based on personal testimonies.

Philemon Dise, Health Committee Secretary, Paga-Kazugu

The village health committee is a group made up of five people: Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Organiser and Trustee. Its major responsibility is to oversee the health care system in the community. While a health volunteer must know how to read and write to be qualified to serve, health committee members, except the Secretary, do not have to be literate though literacy and numeracy skills are clearly an advantage at all levels.



A health committee at a review meeting

The work of the health committee in Paga-Kazugu started on 24th November 1995. A health committee member is selected by his or her community based on commitment, integrity, and willingness to offer voluntary service to one's own people. The duty of the health committee is to help the community to have a better understanding of common diseases and how to prevent them. The health committee supervises the drug revolving fund by ensuring transparency and accountability in its management.

As a health committee member I contribute toward the elimination of common diseases in my community and district as a whole. This is good for me because it makes me gain more knowledge and experience and also respect among my colleagues.

At the village level, opportunities for public service are limited. Without education the situation becomes worse. We health committee members have reason to feel proud that we have been trained to be more useful to our communities than we could have been without that training. If indeed health is not for health professionals only, then we are privileged to be part of the nonprofessional health team that delivers health care to the most needy.

We are the link between health volunteers, the community and the project supervisors of Navrongo Health Research Centre. With the skills and training that we have, we are able to counsel people to know that not all diseases can be treated in their homes.

But we do not work in isolation nor do we feel too big to consult people. We work very closely with local political leaders such as the assembly members who are elected representatives of our community. In collaboration with the chief of our community, we call community meetings monthly to discuss issues and come out with suggested solutions or final decisions that are acceptable to all our people.

We work to promote more than just health issues. If the health volunteer runs into difficulties we are there to offer assistance. For this reason we often find ourselves having to help the volunteer financially when he is in dire need. On other occasions we have to organise communal labour to assist him do some farmwork. The response from the people on such occasions is always encouraging and this can be taken to mean they appreciate the volunteer's work.

So far we are satisfied with the volunteer because he works and seems to like his job very much. The only complaint is that the area he covers is too large and there is the need for additional hands to help out. The community members are happy because whenever trouble strikes, even in the night, there is someone nearby to turn to.

Health Committee Member—Paga Boania

A health committee member is someone who has been elected by his community to monitor the work of the health volunteer. They may be four or five in number. The health committee member makes sure that the health volunteer goes out daily to perform his normal duties. The health committee goes for drugs from the research centre to supply to the health volunteer, whenever he/she runs short of drugs.

Whenever drugs are brought, the health committee makes sure that the drugs are entered into the secretary's book. Whenever the health volunteer has collected any drugs from the treasurer, it is the duty of the secretary to enter it in his or her book. This is the reason why at least the Secretary in a village health committee should be able to read and write.

It is the duty of the health committee chairman to call meetings and give reports. The health committee sees to it that the health volunteer's bicycle is well maintained and not misused by his friends or relations.

The health committee is to enlighten the people about good sanitation but sometimes members may also go round from house to house in the village. Whenever there is an immunization campaign or any health promotion programme, it is the duty of the health committee to inform the chief of the village to announce it to the people of the village to bring the children on the day given for the programme. Every month a designated health committee member goes and pays money on drugs sold and receives new stock.



Health committee member replenishing drug supplies

John Asumkulba—Vunania/Gaani

A health committee member's typical working day is a sweaty one. Early in the morning I wake up and say my morning prayers. Then I take the drug record book to check the balance to see which drugs are getting finished and how much cash is at hand so that I can go for more drugs. If I need to get some more drugs I note this on a paper. I quickly wash down and grab something to eat before I leave the house to start the day's work.

First I go to the clinic to greet the CHO and to find out whether she has any problems. If her compound is untidy I organise people immediately to clean around the clinic. First I go to the chief's house, then to other health committee members and the health volunteer and inform them. Word is quickly spread around the community that some work needs to be done on the nurse's quarters.

Within minutes the clinic is swarmed by men and women with brooms and cutlasses ready to get to work. After taking part in the cleaning for a little while I excuse myself to go to the Navrongo Health Research Centre for a new stock of drugs. At the NHRC, I am usually received with courtesy. I pay for the old stock and receive new one. By the time I return the nurse's house would be well cleaned. Sometimes the community members take the initiative to get things done for the nurse without waiting for the health committee or the health volunteer to prompt them.

Whenever two or three are gathered the health committee member is always in their midst. In line with our duties, we talk to the people about health and health care. We advise them to keep their houses clean and that of their animals. I advise the young men to abstain from premarital sex, and those who cannot abstain should use condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. I also advise them against female genital mutilation, which is common in some of our communities. At about sunset the health volunteer comes for his drugs though this does not happen everyday. I count the drugs for him and enter the information into the drugs balance book.

I encourage the health volunteers to let the health committee know what kind of problems they encounter in the field so that we can try to help solve them. It also enables us to tell others what kind of problems are associated with this kind of work.

Send questions or comments to: What works? What fails?

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